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ABSTRACT

Students of early childhood education studying at teachers' colleges in Israel are usually required to spend 1 to 2 work days weekly in a preschool, supervised by a faculty member who visits the student on site. This study examined the faculty member's perception of self in the role of fieldwork supervisor. Participating in this descriptive multiple case study were six supervisors from five teachers' colleges in Israel. Data were collected by means of observations, interviews, and written materials obtained over the course of 1 school year. Each supervisor was observed for 4 working days and during visits to preschools and encounters with student trainees at work in the field. During each visit to a total of 40 preschools, the supervisor was observed, audiotaped, and interviewed. The findings indicated that the supervisor's visit to the preschool was made up of three principal components: (1) movement around the setting; (2) observation of activities; and (3) supervisory conference. Although, ostensibly, the configuration of the visit was identical for all supervisors, their behavior and the manner in which they perceived each of these three role components differed for each individual. The differences among the supervisors generated a typology of three types of supervision: (1) activity-oriented; (2) child-oriented; and (3) student-oriented. These types of supervision have implications for training programs for supervisors. (Contains 27 references.) (KB)

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Role Perception in Fieldwork Supervisors of Students of Early Childhood Education

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Role Perception in Fieldwork Supervisors of Students of Early Childhood Education

Students of early childhood education studying at teacher's colleges in Israel, are usually required to spend one or two work days per week in a preschool (children aged 3-6 years). Supervision of the student's fieldwork is provided by a faculty member who visits the student on site.

The present study considers the faculty' member's perception of self in the role of fieldwork supervisor. The research was conducted as a descriptive multiple case study. Participants were six supervisors from various teacher's colleges throughout Israel.

Research findings reveal that the supervisor's visit to the preschool is made up of three principal components: "wandering around the setting," "observation of activities" and "supervisory conference". Although, ostensibly, the configuration of the visit is identical for all supervisors, their behaviors and the manner in which they perceive each of these three constituents of their role, differ for each individual.

The differences among the supervisors generated a typology of three types of supervision, specifically "activity-oriented", "child-oriented", and "student-oriented" supervision.

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION

"The role of the early childhood teacher varies in many ways from that of teachers at other levels. These variations can be attributed to factors linked to the age and experience of the learners, the particular organizational contexts in which early childhood teachers work and the distinctions between early childhood and other levels of education" (Katz & Goffin, 1990. p. 192). These distinctions refer to the developmental characteristics of the learner and the philosophical framework of early childhood education.

There exist various definitions of the role of the preschool teacher. Possible explanations for such discrepancies include the influence of the child's developmental level on curriculum design and on goals set for the educational program, emphasis on social and emotional development as opposed to academic tasks, and grounding of the curriculum in a "child - centered" approach as opposed an academic one.

As Katz and Goffin (1990) point out, however, although there are factors common to both elementary and preschool teacher training, the special role of the preschool teacher demands special training in a unique early childhood teacher education program. This training is of necessity shaped by the definition assigned to her future role and unclear definitions of that role cannot help but have an impact on the training program. According to Katz and Goffin (1990) the difficulty in designing an appropriate training program is, in fact, due to unclear definitions of the preschool teacher's role, disagreement over the subjects of knowledge, qualifications and opinions necessary in performing these functions and a rampant ambiguity about the goals and principles of early childhood education. "Our theories of practice - and teacher education - need to be informed by research on teaching that is specific to early childhood education" (p.206).

Although, however, there is a lack of consensus about the specific knowledge and skills required by prospective preschool teachers, there is agreement regarding the importance of the fieldwork component (Spodek & Saracho, 1990). The basic

assumption is that student teaching ameliorates teacher behavior and teacher performance (Applegate, 1985; Katz & Cain, 1987; Katz & Goffin, 1990).

FIELD WORK SUPERVISION

Every program for training preschool teachers includes fieldwork. Fieldwork experience enables the student to translate her theoretical knowledge about child development and educational goals into practice and to apply the theoretical principles acquired in the teachers college to practical work with children (Beyer, 1984).

Although there is no empirical data about the optimal ratio between quantities of practical and theoretical work, it is clear that the practical training workload for prospective early childhood teachers should be significantly expanded (Katz & Cain, 1987). Zeichner (1990), however, argues that "our focus should be on the quality of learning that student teachers experience during a practicum experience and that one should not assume, as has often been the case in the past, that experience equals educative experience and that the more experience, the better" (p. 107). One tactic for enhancing the quality of learning is through supervision of practical work. Supervision of the fieldwork of a teachers college student is considered the most important factor in the training process of early childhood student teachers. The supervisor "not only helps the student to function in the field situation, but also to integrate that experience with the rest of the program" (Shapiro, 1991 p. 1). If, according to some researchers, student fieldwork is the most important intervention in the student's training, it follows that supervision becomes the most important part of that intervention (Turney, 1987). However, although supervision of student teachers is a central issue in the process of teacher training it remains a poorly explored subject. Although there are theoretical commentaries on the nature of supervision (Glickman, 1985) there are, in the literature, only a few, clear theoretical commentaries on methods of supervision (Boydell, 1991; May & Zimpher, 1986).

Zimpher (1987), for example, has conducted a survey of published materials dealing specifically with the role of the university supervisor in student teaching. She concludes that the research on the role of the university supervisor, is quite meager and that the majority of the papers deal only with the training program, field experience or interaction among the participants in the field work experience rather than referring specifically to the supervisor's role. These findings are even more pronounced in field of early childhood education. Notwithstanding numerous references in the literature to the importance of preschool teacher training and, the emphasis placed on field work during the training period, there are no specific references to the role of the supervisor in the framework of the field work in the preschool environment. Research in this particular subject is relatively poor (Katz & Cain, 1987).

Honig & Fears (1974), for example, state that the supervisory role may include a wide variety of duties such as observation, demonstration and evaluation, but offer no detailed description of duties or behaviors of the supervisor when entering the practicum setting. The 'Child Development Associates' publication (CDA, 1984), offers a training program for early childhood educators which describes the elements of the training program in rich detail. Yet while they stress the necessity for "supervised field work" they provide no details about the supervisor's role. The National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1996), the largest US organization of educators and specialists in early childhood has also published guidelines for training of early childhood professionals yet while referring to the

importance of fieldwork in the training program, they similarly stress the importance of "supervised field work" without explaining the nature of the supervision.

Most training institutions, in fact, underestimate the relative complexity of the supervisory role . In general, a new supervisor does not receive help or coaching when starting work in her new role. Supervisors are not trained in theories of supervision or of educational methods (Stones, 1984). Yet the role of the supervisor must be clear to her if she is to function in a flexible and sensitive way while dealing with the student (Honig & Fears, 1972). The lack of a clear definition of the supervisor's role (Goldhammer, Anderson, & Krajewski, 1980) is a common cause of job dissatisfaction of a new supervisor with her function . This is because supervisors are not sufficiently prepared for their work (Danbury, 1979). Usually, supervisors are former school teachers (Glickman, 1985), and although, according to Glickman as such, their views about learning, the nature of the learner and of knowledge, and the role of the teacher influences their view of the supervision, qualification for work with children is not necessarily a guarantee of ability to work with adults. (Caruso & Fawcett, 1986).

Given that the supervisory role is not well defined by educational institutions and that new supervisors receive insufficient instruction in their duties, supervisors tend to each adopt their own individual methods based on personal opinions, experiences and above all intuitions. This paper presents a study aimed at examining, describing and analyzing how the supervisor perceives her role, how she acts and behaves during her visit in the preschool, how she tutors the student and what essential content and methods she uses.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research strategy

The investigative approach chosen for this research was naturalistic. The naturalistic method approaches understanding of human social life through investigation of how individuals interpret their everyday lives and give them meaning. Understanding of society is attained by linking these interpretations to everyday situations in which the people find themselves. Social life can only be understood through the eyes of the participants themselves (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989).

In McIntyre's (1984) study on the role of the supervisor he explains his preference for the naturalistic approach for research in this area with an argument that the sparseness of research into the role of the supervisor and her influence on the student is due mainly to an investigative approach with ill-suited examination methods. He sees conventional statistical research as failing to evaluate small but significant variations in educational behavior.

The naturalistic approach and the use of qualitative analysis can provide a better approach towards the examination of the reasoning and behavior of the supervisor and enable a better compilation of the information about her role. (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). In accordance with this view, the current study follows the format of the descriptive multiple-case study (Yin, 1993). It seems preferable to use this format when investigating a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not entirely clear and the researcher has little control over the events. The multiple case study enables one to keep the holistic and significant characteristics of the phenomenon in the real life situation (Yin, 1994).

The participants were six early childhood education supervisors from five different teachers colleges in Israel. Three of the supervisors are also coordinators for the Early Childhood Education track, in their respective colleges. The supervisors are charged with guiding students during their field work in the preschool, in the course of their training as preschool teachers. Two of the supervisors work with second year students and the other four work with third year students. Early childhood teacher training lasts for three years.

Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that while choosing research sample subjects one has to outline the boundaries of the research, i.e. to define the aspects of the investigated case. In this particular study the definition of boundaries in the case investigation is as follows:

1. The study concerns only the supervisor. There is no reference to any other persons that were in contact with her such as student teachers or children.
2. The study refers only to the period in which the supervisor visited the preschools. It does not include other encounters between the supervisor and the student such as college courses or meetings outside the school work environment.

Data Collection

Data gathering methods included observation, interviews and written material. The data was gathered over the course of one school year. Each supervisor was observed for four working days and during her visits to preschools and her encounters there with student trainees at work in the field.

In total, I visited 40 preschools. During each of those visits, I observed the supervisor and followed up the observation period with an interview. In some cases the supervisor chose to talk before entering the preschool in which case there were two interviews: one before and one after the visit. The observation was focused entirely on the supervisor. It included the supervisor's entire stay at the location, from the moment of entry until her departure. The observation procedure includes a detailed audio taped description of the supervisor's actions. In general whenever the supervisor talked to the student, the conversation was entirely taped in order to avoid loss of important information. In addition to the observation sessions, two more open interviews were conducted: one immediately after each observation session (about forty interviews in all) and a summary interview of each supervisor, after the conclusion of all observation sessions. All interviews were taped.

Data analysis

The process of data analysis in this research was based mainly on the proposals of Strauss & Corbin (1990) for categorical analysis. The process involves reading the text line by line, marking similar passages, defining categories, searching for (new) categories and rereading the text. Subsequently the categories are changed, rearranged, and so on until the final division into categories is achieved. Analysis of the text is conducted similarly for the two separate units: the text describing the observation with the interview which follows and the transcript of the conference between the supervisor and the student.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Supervisor's visit in the preschool

Typically a supervisor visits two preschools a day. She spends approximately one and a half to two and a half hour in each preschool setting. A typical visit begins when the supervisor enters the preschool, says hello and good morning to the student and the teacher, wanders around or sits near the student and the children. Although she may communicate with the student or teacher, or sit near to the children and speak to them, most of her time is spent observing the surrounding activity. After 30 to 60 minutes, the student organizes a group activity with the children. The supervisor sits near them, observing the student's activity. Some 30 minutes later the supervisor rises and suggests that they talk and they go to a quiet corner for a conference. Occasionally, the supervisor invites the teacher to join them. The conference takes about 30 to 60 minutes.

One supervisor described her visit to a preschool as follows: "When I arrive in the morning I usually begin by wandering around to see what is going on, I wander around and look, then I observe the student, and after that we sit down for a conversation." In more formal terms this description of the supervisor's visit in the preschool can be divided into three main components: "wandering around the setting", "observation of student's activity" and, "supervisory conference".

The phase of "wandering around the setting" begins from the moment the supervisor enters the classroom. Usually the supervisor behaves similarly at the beginning of any visit, greeting the persons present, then talking briefly with some of them. A little later, while "wandering around the setting", she observes or takes part in some activities. Subsequently the observation period begins. The supervisor sits down and observes the student who is involved in activities with the children. At the end of the observation period, the conference, the third and final part of the visit, begins. In general, this is the most important part of the visit.

Although, ostensibly, the configuration of the visit is identical for all supervisors, their behavior and the way they perceive their role in each part, differ for each individual. The most pronounced variations occur during the stage of "wandering around the setting" and during the "supervisory conference." These differences show that there is no single opinion about the role of the supervisor but that different supervisors have different ideas about their role and that each one of these ideas is in and of itself, coherent. Thus it is conceivable to claim that each one represents "a type of supervisor."

For instance, while all the supervisors observe and follow the activities of the group during the period of "wandering around the setting" they may adopt one of two clear perspectives on this stage:

1. "Wandering around the setting" as a means of evaluating the student's performance. One of the supervisors explains her perception of her role during this stage: "I watch the student because I want to see how she manages with the children. I observe her activities ...I want to see her authority in the class".
2. "Wandering around the setting" as a period of participation in the preschool activities and learning. Another supervisor says: "I start wandering around the setting to see what is going on. I see the student, I absorb the atmosphere... my role as a supervisor is first of all to apprehend the situation, where am I today, what is going on, I need time to look around and take in the atmosphere around me." The supervisors who have chosen the first approach dedicate more time to watching from the side,

while the supervisors who support the other approach participate more readily in the school activities.

Analysis of the conference between the supervisor and the student highlights additional differences in the supervising approaches. The nature of the verbal interchange between the supervisor and the student, the degree of initiative and the quality of the guidance given by the supervisor all determine the style of the supervision conference. Two distinct styles of the supervisory conference which have been pinpointed in the literature are the elicitation and collaboration modes (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 1992). In the elicitation mode the supervisor leads the conversation: she introduces the subject and determines the course of the conversations by asking questions which elicit brief responses from the student. Often "yes" or "no" responses suffice in this mode. In the collaboration mode the supervisor and the student both contribute to the course of the conversation. They listen and react to one another's discourse, introducing commentary and details in order to clarify when necessary. Both the supervisor and the student introduce new subjects to the dialog.

Types of Supervisors

Differences among the supervisors, as they emerge in the three stages of the preschool visit, can be conceptualized in terms of three principal types of supervision: "activity oriented" type, "child oriented" and "student oriented" respectively.

The "activity oriented" type

The "activity oriented" supervisor perceives supervision mainly in the context of performing activities with the children in the preschool. During her visit to the preschool the supervisor expects the student to function as a teacher responsible for the daily schedule and activities of the setting. The student's role is to learn the functions of the preschool teacher while the supervisor is responsible for knowing the correct way of performing these functions. Supervision therefore consists mainly of giving advice, correcting, giving positive feedback or helping the student to interpret the meaning of her actions. The phase of "wandering around the setting" is devoted to evaluating the student's performance. Thus the supervisor observes and does not interfere in the activities of the children. She also observes the scheduling, i.e. how the student arranges the order of activities and the materials necessary for their performance.

The conference, in this case, focuses mainly on the goals of the activity, the student's considerations in choosing an activity, and the ways in which it was implemented. The main consideration in determining the subject of the conference is evaluation of the student's performance: the conversation focuses on issues that need improvement. The main characteristic of the "activity oriented" type conference is "elicitation." This means that the supervisor introduces the subject of the conference and remains responsible for the course of the conversation. In general the supervisor asks the questions and the student replies.

The "child oriented" type

The supervisor of the "child oriented" type sees her role in the context of activities with children and not as a sum total of relationships between her and the student. The supervision is perceived as a mutual learning experience for the supervisor and the

student, about the children and about the ways that the student relates to their activities. The purpose of the supervision is to enhance the student's ability to perceive children and to develop a special sensitivity towards them. The supervisor views initiation of change in the thinking habits of the student, as one of the elements of the supervision. The supervisor encourages the student to reflect upon her activities and to become more aware of the ways that she reacts to the child with whom she is working. She also requires that the student become involved in activities initiated by the child as well as those designed beforehand, and expects the student to develop sensitivity to individual differences among the children. The period of "wandering around the setting" is devoted to learning - about the preschool, the children and the student.

The conference, dubbed "peer conversation" focuses mainly on the children's behavior during the activities and on the subsequent reactions of the student. The student and the supervisor acquire insight into the children together. The main characteristic of the "child oriented" type conference is "collaboration"

The "student oriented" type.

The "student oriented" supervisor defines her role as a variety of interactive relations between her and the student and aims to relate to her student on a basis of equality. Her declared goal is to train the student to acquire a sense of self-worth while fostering attentiveness to the needs of the children. Her principal aim in her role as supervisor is to enhance the student's awareness of her behavior and of her character. The supervisor sees the student as a mature person capable of making intelligent choices about suitable methods. Therefore she expects that the student will make independent choices as to what is appropriate teaching strategy . She assumes that the student will independently acquire knowledge of the different children, of their special needs and of the programs which are most appropriate to each of them. The period of "wandering around the setting" is characterized mainly by interchanges between the supervisor and the student. The supervisor does not interact with the children. She assumes that by placing the student at the center, and conversing with the student about herself, her work, and her feelings, she will demonstrate the importance of the child-oriented approach. This, in her opinion, is more important than any activity that the student may perform. Observation of activities is thus less important during the visit.

The conference focuses mainly on the student. Guidelines for conducting the conference relate primarily to better acquaintance with the student and her personality. The main element in a conference with a "student oriented" supervisor is "collaboration".

Summary

The different types of supervision presented in this study are in line with theoretical distinctions in supervision suggested by Glickman (1985) who describes three major educational philosophies that are relevant to supervision:

1) Essentialism - "The world is a preordained, mechanistic reality. All of existence operates according to scientific, cause-and-effect relations." (p. 84) There exist fundamental truths and clear standards in the teaching profession and the supervisor is aware of their existence and teaches them to the teacher: "Essentialism in terms of supervision emphasizes the supervisor as the person who teaches truths about teaching

to teachers. Supervisors are those most knowledgeable about those absolute standards" (p. 85)

According to the lines of essentialist philosopy the approach during the supervision conference should be one of directive supervision - rooted in the belief that teaching is based on skills that are evident and understood and that the role of the supervisor is therefore to impart knowledge, guide, demonstrate, and evaluate the teacher's ability. This seems to be the attitude of the supervisors of the "activity oriented" type in the present research.

2) "Experimentalism" - "Reality is what works". Experimentalists never make claims to absolute truth. The supervisor, according to this philosophy, perceives the school as a laboratory by means of which one can verify different truths. The supervisor and the teacher learn together: "test old hypotheses and try new ones. Supervisors work democratically with teachers to achieve collective ends that will help everyone." (p.86)

The supervisory conference approach most relevant to experimentalism is that of collaborative supervision -based on the belief that teaching is primarily problem solving. The supervisor guides the problem- solving process. She and the student jointly analyze the problems and the solutions. This seems to be the attitude of the supervisors of the "child oriented" type in this research.

3) "Existentialism" - "The basic tenet of the philosophy is that the individual is the source of all reality. All that exists in the world is the meaning the individual attributes to his or her own experiences." Human relations become very important, affirming individual worth and protecting the individual's right to discover his or her own truth. The supervisor provides the environment which allows the teacher to independently explore by her own capabilities. The teacher must learn by herself and "Supervisors help when needed, protect the rights of others to self-discovery, and encounter the teacher as a person of full importance." (p.87)

According to existentialist philosophy the approach during the supervision conference should be one of non-directive supervision in which learning is primarily a private experience. The supervisor's role is to listen non-judgmentally and provide self-awareness and clarification experiences for teachers. This seems to be the attitude of the supervisors of the "student oriented" type in this research.

The following table illustrates the main characteristics of each type of supervisor.

Type	Supervisory approach according to Glickman	Perception of "wandering around the setting"	Conference content	Mode of conversation in the supervisory conference (according to Kulka & Snow)
"Activity oriented"	Essentialism *Directive supervision*	Opportunity for student evaluation	Activity goals and the manner of implementation	Elicitation
"Child oriented"	Experimentalism *Collaborative supervision*	Opportunity for the supervisor learning	Children's behavior	Collaboration
"Student oriented" .	Existentialism *Non-directive supervision*	Opportunity for talking with the student	The student and her personality	Collaboration

The presentation of different supervisory types as illustrated in this study opens up new perspectives on supervision of early childhood teachers and contributes to a clearer definition of the supervisor's role in this task. I therefore recommend development of a training program which will assist supervisors, especially in the beginning of their supervisory careers. Such a program will familiarize supervisors with different views, contents and methods in supervision. It will thus enable the supervisor to take advantage of existing theories and research in the development of appropriate approaches and working methods. In this study, in contrast, the supervisors acknowledged that the most significant element of their training was a process of trial and error. Conceivably, such a hit and miss process could be avoided, were there a well planned training program for supervision in the field work of the early childhood student in teacher's college.

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